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Genealogies of shamanism

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9

Struggles for power, charisma and authority: a balance

In August 2007 I received a digital newsletter from the Institute of Siberian Shamanism, which is located in the southern part of the Netherlands. The newsletter included an invitation to participate in a special ceremony that would take place on 24 August from 7.30 p.m. until 10 p.m. It would cost EUR 15 to participate. Working at three locations in the Netherlands at the same time, shamans would create an energetic triangle that would heighten the level of energy in the Netherlands and the world. Shamans and participants would send love to all living things through the ceremony, thereby bringing harmony all over the world and preventing disasters. Similar triangles would be created in other European countries, all in accordance with the right 'astrologic aspects'. The newsletter added that the shamans would also manage a shamanic weekend a couple of days after the ceremony. One of the ceremonies would take place at Byelka's centre, in the south of the Netherlands, but I decided to participate in the northern corner of the ceremony and I went to Mirre, once again, to experience shamanism.

In Mirre's largest practice room, approximately forty-five people had gathered around a Russian-speaking woman of about forty years old. The woman who acted as her interpreter told us that she was a Siberian shamanca. We could have guessed that as she was dressed in an eye-catching Siberian style. Her sparkling long robes, her long well-groomed hair and her neatly polished nails clearly distinguished her from the Dutch participants. Her chic appearance also contrasted sharply with the lax and loose appearance of the Dutch men and women in the room. The shamanca and her interpreter began the gathering by describing the awkward ecological situation of the earth and telling us that scientists knew about global warming and about the melting of the poles. This situation led to catastrophes such as hurricanes and tsunamis.

Referring to the devastating 2004 tsunami, the shamanca argued that animals had seen it coming. Tourists remained at the coast, ignorant of the disastrous waves that were coming, but elephants and other animals had left the coastal area as they had sensed that trouble was coming. The shamanca told us that she was sure that more tragedies would follow, also in the Netherlands. She knew, for instance, that Dutch ants moved inland, away from the coast. According to her, people could be aware of nature's courses of action but they needed to practise this sensitivity. And

that was exactly what we were going to do during the ceremony. She told us that at the end of the evening we would have the ability to warn others of the dangers that lay ahead. To arrive at this goal we had to invest in the ceremony. We would receive as much as we gave.

She instructed us to move our bodies. Gradually, we had to move more passionately. Then she taught us that we could throw away our past by moving as if we were hurling it from us. In the next phase of the ceremony we had to embrace the future, hugging it, as it were. We were also asked to hug each other now, sharing our love and energy with the others. Notwithstanding the significant purpose of the meeting, the ambience was playful and light-hearted. Except for one man who refused to participate and sat down on a chair in a corner, most participants laughed and had fun. Some participants tried to persuade the man to get involved, and their stance was always humorous and welcoming. No-one rejected his sceptic attitude. At one point, the shamanca asked us to lie down on mats on the floor and she would then guide us on a trance journey. While we were supposed to leave our physical bodies behind and travel with our ethereal bodies, she directed us towards the legendary secret society of Shambalah. There we would find a crystal in which we could discern the whole earth. The crystal would be located in a large room on a table that was surrounded by a group of exemplary wise human beings. We could ask them questions and favours for ourselves and for our friends, for family members and for other loved ones. The shamanca told us that this circle of sages included Jesus, Mohamed, Gurdjieff and Carlos Castaneda.

This ceremony brings me back to the questions that guided my analysis of the genealogies of shamanism. In other words, it is a case through which I can recapitulate some of the most significant aspects of my reconstruction of the genealogies of shamanism. First, it is important to note that by reconstructing these I entered the ring of shamanology. Struggling my way through it, I became part of this field, albeit perhaps as a fringe contender.¹ My book is part of the genealogies of shamanism, and it may, obviously, be tackled by other scholars.

Therefore I would like to start my final analysis by elaborating on the kind of scientific reflexivity that Bourdieu has labelled 'participant objectivation'.² Subsequently, I will concentrate on four interrelated themes that are crucial for the interpretation of contemporary shamanisms, namely individualism, consumerism, authenticity and empowerment. I will conclude this second part with a reflection on shamanisms in society. In the third part I will shift the attention away from

1 The term 'fringe contender' comes from boxing and refers to a low-rated contender on the cusp of the world rankings.

2 P. Bourdieu, 'Participant Objectivation', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9 (2003) 281-94. See also idem, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* (Cambridge, 2007), which is not an autobiography but an application of Bourdieu's theories to his own life and intellectual trajectory.

contemporary shamanisms to the genealogies of shamanism. The continuities and discontinuities and the classification of shamanism will be the main points here. These issues, however, are also important for an understanding of contemporary shamanisms, as they help to answer questions such as Does the shamanca practise a form of Siberian shamanism that has been passed down through the centuries? Is she part of an anti-modern cultural stream that started to flow centuries ago? I conclude my final chapter by returning to Hutton, Von Stuckrad and Znamenski. By comparing their historiographies with my genealogies, I reflect on the power and weaknesses of shamanology.

Participant objectivation

Participating in the shamanca's ceremony amused me, but I never lost my reflexive stance. I did not 'go native' and come back, and I did not feel empowered at the end of the evening. Certainly, my dispositions guided the functioning and findings of my participant observation and, as I have explained in the first chapter, they guided me towards the genealogical mapping of shamanism. To cut a long story short, my distinctly critical and reflexive perspectives on the construction and authorisation of knowledge are shaped by the chronology of different circumstances that have also affected my life and my positioning in the academic field.

Initially, my habitus was structured by my upbringing in a non-academic and non-church-going family. In particular, my father's aversion to churches, his left-wing politics and, somewhat later, his esoteric search for perennial truths has had an impact on me. The economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s has shaped me, as has my period of unemployment during the 1980s. In short, these events have strengthened my individualism and my rather unfocused anti-establishment mentality, as I opposed the authorities that I deemed responsible for the initiation and implementation of the cuts and deregulations that structured society during the 1980s. Yet at the same time as I was not investing in the field of politics, my interest in mysticism was intensifying. I searched for truths in the writings of authors such as Aldous Huxley, Henry Miller, Alan Watts, Hermann Hesse, Krishnamurti and Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. It was a solitary quest, as I did not participate in any esoteric practices and I hardly ever spoke about my esoteric concerns with friends.

My bookish curiosity accounts for my turn to academic religious studies in 1990. Enthusiastically and full of expectations about what I was going to learn in this centre of knowledge, I plunged into the academic field. Yet my enthusiasm waned somewhat, as I disapproved of the Christian and religionist bias of some of the scholars who taught me. Moreover, I did not have a good feel for the game that is played in academia and lacked the cultural and symbolic capital that was needed to study religious texts, an academic practice that is highly valued at the Groningen Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. As soon as I was free to select my

own branches of learning, I gravitated towards the scholars who suited my habitus best and, in line with their dispositions, my interests in esotericism waned while my taste for social science waxed.

Under their guidance, I went to Gozo, Malta, as a Master's student in 1993, to study the votive offerings hanging in the Ta'Pinu basilica and, sure enough, to face 'the *sine qua non* of modern anthropology, the ritual initiation experience in the discipline', as one anthropologist has called it.³ Ta' Pinu is a local pilgrimage church that was built at the beginning of the twentieth century to replace a small chapel where, according to the local inhabitants and the church authorities, Mary had appeared in 1883. It is the only church on Gozo in which votive offerings are on display within the church. When I travelled to Malta I had as yet no clear ideas about the research questions that would guide my fieldwork.

During fieldwork, however, I became aware of my scholarly dispositions and this made doing fieldwork a tremendously valuable experience. That is to say, I found out that I was especially interested in the approval and encouragement of the votive offerings and other devotional practices at Ta'Pinu by church authorities and, consequently, I realised that I was inclined to focus on social power and authority. At the same time, however, I explored the meanings of this 'sacred centre' for the local population. In other words, I interpreted the Ta' Pinu as a site of struggles and as a source of power.⁴

A couple of years after I graduated, I started to earn my living as an editor and indexer, but the job did not suit my intellectual ambitions. Therefore, I took steps in the direction of journalism, for instance by publishing sceptical articles about reiki, druidism and shamanism for *Skepter* (see Chapter 1).⁵ At the same time, however, I was given the opportunity to teach a number of courses in sociology and anthropology at the Groningen faculty where I had graduated in religious studies. I found a position in the ivory tower of academia very appealing, for several reasons. The salary was good, for instance, and I also had pleasure in the rela-

3 R.A. Berger, 'From Text to (Field)work and Back Again: Theorizing a Post(modern)-Ethnography', *Anthropological Quarterly* 66 (1993) 174-86 at 174. I was never attracted to Berger's idea of a 'post(modern)-ethnography, a counter-discursive practice that embraces creative aspects of figuration and play while abandoning the need to maintain a descriptive force', however (174).

4 See J.W. Boekhoven, *Devotie, Macht en Identiteit. Een cultureel-antropologisch onderzoek naar de ex-voto's van de Ta'Pinu* (unpublished MA thesis, Groningen, 1994), 'Over de schatkist van een lokaal pelgrimsoord. De votiefgeschenken van de Ta'Pinu-basiliek op Gozo', in J. Pieper et al. (eds.), *Pelgrimage in Beweging: Een christelijk ritueel in nieuwe contexten* (Baarn, 1999) 119-35, 'De Madonna Ta'Pinu van Gozo, Malta', *Prana* 116 (1999) 4-7.

5 J.W. Boekhoven, 'Dromen over druïden. Een spoor van verzonnen tradities', *Skepter* 16/4 (2003) 16-9, 'Een piramide van meesters. De constructie van reikitradiaties', *Skepter* 14/4 (2001) 20-3, 'Contact op de koop toe. Nederlandse sjamanen en hun praktijken', *Skepter* 15/1 (2002) 24-7.

tive freedom of academic life and the social standing that comes with an academic position. However, I did not have the necessary qualifications to acquire a permanent position. When a vacancy for a PhD student arose, it seemed to be the solution.

So I started as a PhD student, working on a thesis about shamanism, and abandoned my sceptical journalistic aspirations as they could upset my fieldwork amongst shamanic groups. During my PhD period, my need for a regular job increased, especially because of the birth of my children, and I was confronted with a scarcity of academic opportunities. My marriage and my children had reduced my flexibility to manoeuvre in the international academic field. At the same time, however, the distinct struggles that structured academia discouraged me. I had become aware that academic positions were sometimes held by scholars whose academic authority was primarily based on symbolic capital. Their authoritative position did not seem to relate to significant or rigorous scholarly knowledge or practices. I was not the only PhD student who disliked the idea that some scholars were considered as academic authorities because of their social position within academia. The situation fed my anti-establishment dispositions. This time, the establishment included religious, political and scholarly authorities.

In my application for a position as a PhD student I had already brought up James Beckford, as I wanted to interpret shamanism in the Netherlands as a social construction, in line with the methodology that had already guided my Master's thesis. As I shifted my research in the direction of the genealogies of shamanism, however, I was happy to incorporate Bourdieu's theory of practice, as it allowed me to deal with the production and authorisation of academic knowledge critically, and to interpret the production of academic knowledge as a social game. Obviously, as I have made clear in the preceding chapters, the notions of Beckford and Bourdieu also guided my participant observation during the shamanca's ceremony. Instead of focusing on my experiences, I observed the Siberian shamanca practising, constructing and legitimising her Siberian shamanism, and an enthusiastic group of Dutch shamanists enjoying her performance.

The field of shamanism

For the shamanists involved, by contrast, the ceremony seemed to entail a beneficial return to archaic and perennial forms of shamanic wisdom, as they participated in a ceremony that was presented as a source of shamanic power that is a universal, perennial and personal healing power. The ceremony could help them to reconnect with the forces of nature that are hidden to most Westerners as they are alienated from these forces. The altruistic aspect of the practice was clear; humanity at large was supposed to benefit from it. We were going to heal the world by working at the personal growth of our selves. We were working on a shamanic

variant of self-discovery, self-development and self-realisation, and thus we were engaged in what has been labelled 'self-religion'. At the same time, however, the shamanca was recognised as an authority who could help us find the wisdom in ourselves. This brings us to individualism, which is an intricate theme that is vital for an understanding of the logic of the field of shamanism.

Individualism

In his classic *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, originally published in 1904-5, Max Weber already noted: 'Der Ausdruck "Individualismus" umfaßt das Denkbare Heterogenste.'⁶ His words remain true, as the sociologist Steven Lukes also noted in 1971. He observed that the term individualism was used in a great many ways, in many different contexts and with an exceptional lack of precision.⁷ Indeed, in some cases individualism is perceived as a dangerous idea, as social or economic anarchy and as a lack of the requisite norms and institutions. On the other hand, it may also represent a Utopian ideology and, as we have seen, a narcissistic prevalence of self-interested attitudes among individuals. Individualism is thus a tricky concept that can have different ideological meanings as it is constructed in a variety of circumstances.⁸

The complexity of the concept is illustrated in an insightful article by the anthropologist Sherry Beth Ortner. In the context of shamanism and Buddhism among the Sherpas of Nepal, Ortner found that Buddhist monks discredited their rivals by labelling them individualistic, implying that shamans were strictly self-interested. However, as Ortner convincingly argued, individualism is not an 'on-

6 M. Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (Munich, 2006²) 208. Talcott Parsons translated this phrase as follows: 'The expression of individualism includes the most heterogeneous things imaginable'; see M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London, 1974¹²) 222.

7 S. Lukes, 'The Meanings of "Individualism"', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (1971) 45-66 at 45. For the progress of individualism in the Western world, see L. Dumont, 'A Modified View of Our Origins: The Christian Beginnings of Modern Individualism', *Religion* 12 (1982) 1-27; R. Bellah, K. Burrige and R. Robertson, 'Responses to Louis Dumont's "A Modified View of Our Origins: The Christian Beginnings of Modern Individualism"', *Religion* 12 (1982) 83-91; A. Buss, 'The Evolution of Western Individualism', *Religion* 30 (2000) 1-15; D. Hervieu-Léger, 'Religious Individualism, Modern Individualism, and Self-Fulfilment: A Few Reflections On the Origins of Contemporary Religious Individualism', in E. Barker (ed.), *The Centrality of Religion in Social Life. Essays in Honour of James A. Beckford* (Aldershot, 2010) 29-39.

8 For instance, strangely enough, Havelock Ellis, who featured in Chapter 2, argued that 'There can be no Socialism without Individualism; there can be no Individualism without Socialism', see idem, 'Individualism and Socialism', *Contemporary Review* 101 (1912) 519-28 at 524. See also T.C. Heller and C. Brooke-Rose (eds.), *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford, 1986).

tological object' but an ideological formation that is normally embedded in 'the narrative of modernization'. 'Relationalism', which is the opposite concept, is not only used ideologically as a label against threatening individualism, but also to suggest that practices are demanding and cloying. Ortner argued that the simple opposition shamanism/monasticism was based on imagined essential qualities of the two types of practitioners while, in her view, 'the qualities are not essences of the categories, but charges that are up for grabs and that can be levelled by any sector against any other'. While relationalism and individualism exist, they are 'large scale forces around which every group divides and unites in an unending political process. The ideological move comes from pretending (whether in Sherpa life or academic journals) that certain alignments are essential to certain groups'. Ultimately, Ortner argued that individualism is 'situated in a discursive field'.⁹

Indeed, to understand the complexity of individualism in Dutch shamanisms, we must situate it in the Dutch field of shamanism. To begin with, Paul Heelas's interpretation of contemporary esoteric practices as 'self-religion' and his emphasis on individualism is noteworthy. As a matter of fact, the ceremony in Valthe was, like other shamanic practices, focused on self-discovery, self-development and self-realisation, and it is therefore tempting to label the practice 'self-religion'. Heelas argues that New Age religion is self-religion because individuals perform actions on the basis of their own authority. and even if this occurs by drawing from available authorities and traditions, self-authority is the basis of social practices. According to him, the development of self-religion was underpinned by processes of subjectivisation and detraditionalisation, which means that people increasingly take action on the basis of their own authority. Yet even if the 'spiritual revolution' involves the establishment of discourses of self-authority, is self-authority the basis of contemporary esoteric practices?¹⁰

As we have seen in the first chapter, James Beckford argues that the term 'self-religion' may be 'appropriate for the many new and alternative forms of spirituality and religion which encourage practitioners to draw inspiration and guidance from within their own minds and bodies rather than from external texts, traditions or human authorities'. However, he denounces the suggestion that so-called New Age believers use inner sources of authority instead of outer sources as too dichotomous. According to him, the distinction between inner and outer sources of authority is not always clear.¹¹ Matthew Wood's suggestion that scholars have

9 S.B. Ortner, 'The Case of the Disappearing Shamans, or No Individualism, No Relationalism', *Ethos* 23 (1995) 355-90 at 370 and 387. See also J.W. Duyvendak, 'De individualiserende van de samenleving en de toekomst van de sociologie', *Sociologische Gids* 51 (2004) 495-506.

10 P. Heelas, *The New Age Movement* (Oxford, 1996); P. Heelas and L. Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution* (Oxford, 2005).

11 E. Hedges and J. Beckford, 'Holism, Healing and the New Age', in S. Sutcliffe and M. Bowman (eds.), *Beyond New Age. Exploring Alternative Spirituality* (Edinburgh, 2000) 169-87.

mistakenly used insiders' discourses about self-authority as assertions that people act in terms of their own authority is important enough for my argument to repeat here. The insider's discourse has been accepted as an explanation in itself. Scholars, however, should investigate 'the socializing effects of moralities, obligations and injunctions' in this field. According to Wood, the actions in the field of esotericism (he uses the term 'religious setting') should not be interpreted as choices made on the basis of self-authority. Instead, they are better explained as strategic improvisations. Strategies are neither imposed nor chosen as they are improvised responses, based on the habitus and drawing on the recourses that are available in the field.¹²

In their plea for a 'radical sociologisation' of New Age research, Aupers and Houtman argued that scholars should focus on the ways that the doctrine ideal of self-spirituality is socially constructed, transmitted and reinforced. Sociologists should not reproduce the sociologically naive New Age rhetoric about the primacy of personal authenticity, they should critically deconstruct it. According to them, New Age is not just individualistic, it is socially and publicly significant. It may be characterised by a sacralisation of the self and a demonisation of social institutions, but these doctrines provide the spiritual milieu with an ideological coherence. Instead of the commonly held idea that 'bricolage' and/or 'eclecticism' are fundamental for the spiritual supermarket, Aupers and Houtman emphasise the virtual omnipresence of perennialism, that is, the idea that 'the diversity of religious traditions essentially refers to the same underlying spiritual truth'.¹³ Undeniably, perennialism was also an aspect of the teachings of the shamanca. Notwithstanding her Siberianness, by referring to the 'circle of sages' she taught us an original variant of shamanic perennialism.

It is time to return to Beckford again. His term 'free space' can be used to understand the field in which individuals feel themselves free to experiment with shamanism, and the concept should be used cautiously.¹⁴ To be precise, the liberty of individuals to experiment with shamanism is restricted by the logic of the game that is called shamanism. In other words, the freedom of shamanism is relative as it is regulated by the distinct struggles that characterise the economy of shamanic goods. Discourses of self-authority may suggest that there are no authorities outside the individual selves, but ultimately it means that there are ambiguities of authority, as Matthew Wood argues. Indeed, a basic feature of the field is the prevalence for nonformative authorities. This aspect is, as I have argued before, closely related to the anti-authoritarian, client-centred approach that was constructed during the 1960s and 1970s wave of humanistic psychology. Rogers's

12 M. Wood, 'The Nonformative Elements of Religious Life: Questioning the "Sociology of Spirituality" Paradigm', *Social Compass* 56 (2009) 327-48 and 'Strategy in a Religious Network: A Bourdieuan Critique of the Sociology of Spirituality', *Sociology* 43 (2010) 286-303.

13 S. Aupers and D. Houtman, 'Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21 (2006) 201-22.

14 Hedges and Beckford, 'Holism, Healing and the New Age', 169-87.

clinical framework also seemed to have structured the ceremony, as the shamanca was not surrounded by disciples or devotees, but by clients and students who may decide to obtain their shamanic goods elsewhere. Is it, therefore, right to argue that they are consumers, consuming shamanic goods?

Consumerism

As nonformative authorities struggle to promote their supposedly non-commercial shamanic practices, the field of shamanism can be described as a marketplace or as an economy of shamanic goods, to rephrase Bourdieu. As I have argued before, the field of shamanism has elective affinities with neoliberal free market structures. But does it help to interpret the authorities in the field as marketers, disposed to put their shamanic goods up for sale? This is an important question, as the connection between esotericism, capitalism and consumerism is a hotly debated issue.¹⁵

Again, Paul Heelas's opinions offer a good starting point to tackle the issue of consumerism. He argues forcefully against the interpretation of 'holistic spirituality' as merely an extension of capitalism in which people consume spirituality without giving anything back. Intended to 'argue the case for "spiritual" significance of reality', Heelas argues that 'the growth of New Age spiritualities of life is by no means entirely "eaten up" by the bodies-cum-psychologies of consumers'. Instead, participants in 'holistic spirituality' have moved '*beyond* the allures of consumer culture'. According to Heelas, 'holistic, face-to-face activities (in particular) can facilitate a 'current' of meaningful experiences' and 'participation *can* serve to make a *difference* to the ways people live out their lives'.¹⁶

It is telling, however, that Heelas interprets 'consumptive capitalism' as aimed at 'superficial consumption' or at 'utilitarian individualism and hedonistic gratification'. He distinguishes 'good taste' from 'bad taste', to use the terminology of Bourdieu, who argued that taste is a social construction as all taste is acquired.

15 According to Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, esoteric practices have become part of the strategies through which 'business culture' serves the interest of 'corporate capitalism'. They bemoan 'the silent takeover of religion' and even lament that spirituality has been 'hijacked' by corporations, J. Carrette and R. King, *Selling Spirituality. The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London and New York, 2005). Even though I agree with some of their arguments, I did not meet any 'corporate shamans' in the field of shamanism, and I have not detected a silent takeover of shamanism, see R.C. Whitely, *The Corporate Shaman: A Business Fable* (New York, 2002). See also M. Ramstedt, 'New Age and Business', in D. Kemp and J.R. Lewis (eds.), *Handbook of New Age* (Leiden, 2007) 186-205.

16 P. Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life. New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (Malden, 2008) 8-9. It is noteworthy that in 1992, Paul Heelas critically reflected on the so-called 'enterprise culture' in a volume he co-edited with Paul Morris, *The Values of the Enterprise Culture: the Moral Debate* (London, 1992).

Heelas, in contrast, stigmatizes the consumption choices of out-group members as morally inferior. The idea that 'consumerism' reflects an inferior set of values must be treated with the utmost suspicion. Heelas's disavowal of the economy, as Bourdieu would have called it, seems to reflect the insiders' discourse. That is to say, although shamanic and esoteric authorities may present themselves as disinterested, they do manage their esoteric or shamanic goods as marketable items. This does not mean that the consumption of shamanic goods is aimed at utilitarian gratification. Instead, consumerism often involves an emphasis on the profoundly idealist and spiritual fulfilment of products. As we have seen, images of the exotic, the natural, the surreal and the unconscious are deployed to market shamanic goods. The mechanisms and manufacture tend to be hidden, and products are presented as either immaculate conceptions or as linked to a mythological history. Actually, consumerism is about feeling, imaginative desiring and longing, rather than reason.¹⁷

Indeed, the consumption of shamanism can be perceived as a moment in almost every shamanic practice. As the sociologist Alan Warde argued, 'consumption is a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion'.¹⁸ The process is structured by shamanic authorities, who, as tastemakers, impose consumer needs. In order to be able to sell the symbolic products they have to offer, they produce a need for them in potential consumers by symbolic actions. They tend to impose norms and needs, particularly in the areas of lifestyle and material or cultural consumption.¹⁹ Even as they sharply distinguish their practices from commerce, all shamanic practitioners are marketing shamanic goods. As a matter of fact, every shamanism is a brand.

The economy of shamanic goods is thus structured by a range of nonformative shamanic authorities, who market their variety of shamanic practices in accordance with the logic of the field of shamanism. Their success in the field, however, depends on their feel for a game whose very functioning is defined by a 'disavowal of the economy', as Bourdieu called the collective disavowal of commercial profit and interests. Producers of shamanic goods who 'go commercial' condemn themselves because they deprive themselves of the opportunities open to those who

17 P. Bourdieu, 'The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods', *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1980) 261-93 at 261; D. Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge, 1997) 95-7; J. Heath, 'The Structure of Hip Consumerism', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 27 (2001) 1-17; J. O'Shaughnessy and N.J. O'Shaughnessy, 'Marketing, the consumer society and hedonism', *European Journal of Marketing* 36 (2002) 524-47; Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life*, 8-9.

18 A. Warde, 'Consumption and Theories of Practice', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5 (2005) 131-53 at 137.

19 P. Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984) 345.

recognise the specific demands of this universe. Ultimately, therefore, shamanists are variants of hip consumers who turn anti-consumerism into a reason for more consumption. Shamanic authorities, therefore, habitually plead for what the musicologist Tim Taylor calls 'authenticity of positionality', which denotes the authenticity acquired by performers who refuse to 'sell out' to commercial interests.²⁰

Authenticity

The quest for authenticity is prominent amongst shamanists and other so-called New Agers. Paradoxically, this aspiration for authenticity matches the prevalent cultural norms.²¹ That is to say, the search for a sense of authenticity is the most salient and pervasive consequence of the threats modernity makes to our ordinary reality and sense of significance, as the anthropologist Charles Lindholm argued. The challenges of modernity, however, offer avenues for the creation of different kinds of authentic realities.²² Authenticity is a socially constructed phenomenon that shifts across time and space. It can be defined as the 'real', the 'genuine', the 'sincere', the 'essential', the 'natural', the 'rooted' and so on, but these terms must be contextualised.²³

20 T.D. Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York and London, 1997) 22-3. See also S. Binkley, 'Liquid Consumption. Anti-consumerism and the fetishized de-fetishization of commodities', *Cultural Studies* 22 (2008) 599-23. Sam Binkley argues that anti-consumerist practices and sensibilities shape personal identities by appealing to a de commodified sociability. According to him, this sociability is more often the rhetorical production of anti-consumerist discourses, and hence not capable of reinforcing the identity projects they aim to consolidate.

21 S. Aupers, D. Houtman and I. van der Tak, 'Gewoon worden wie je bent'. Over authenticiteit en anti-institutionalisme', *Sociologische Gids* 50 (2003) 203-23.

22 C. Lindholm, 'Authenticity, Anthropology, and the Sacred', *Anthropological Quarterly* 75 (2002) 331-8 at 338. See also idem, *Culture and Authenticity* (Oxford, 2008).

23 P. Vannini and J.P. Williams, 'Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society', in idem (eds.), *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society* (Farnham, 2009) 1-20; S. Aupers, D. Houtman and J. Roeland, 'Authenticiteit. De culturele obsessie met echt en onecht', *Sociologie* 6 (2010). The German sociologist and philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) must be mentioned here, as he considered the jargon of authenticity to be a social disease. In his attack on Heidegger and other existentialists he argued that this jargon, with its implicit claim to be grounded in an authentic experience beyond the reach of the market and instrumental reason, seems to promise an alternative to the 'degraded' experience of capitalist modernity. According to Adorno, however, the proponents of the jargon lay claim to an immediate experience of authenticity without challenging the social and institutional forms – mass production, bureaucratic rationality, the culture industry and, least acknowledged of all, 'unfree labor' – of which it is the inevitable by-product. Consequently, Adorno argued, this promise of a true existence becomes a lie, see T. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (London, 1973).

Needless to say, actions in the field of shamanism are also guided by a concern for authenticity. As a matter of fact, the authentic is a central defining feature in the field, conferring value on objects and creators. Authenticity is a symbolic asset, and, to return to the theme of the preceding sections, it is an important aspect of the consumerist structures of the economy of shamanic goods. In Bourdieu's terminology, the social value of authenticity is only placed on shamanic practitioners in their relationship to the market, that is, in and by the objective relationship of competition opposing them to all other products by which their distinctive value is determined. To become an authority in the field, and in order to be believed, respected and distinguished, shamanic practitioners need to authenticate their practices. Authentication is thus a form of power. It can be a product of strategic political processes and has to be crafted and staged in accordance with the logic of the field.²⁴

The authenticity of the shamanca who guided us through the ceremony, for instance, was based on her Siberianness, which she explicitly associated with an intimate bond with nature. During her presentation she created 'authenticity of primality', as Taylor calls it. That is, the idea of consuming something with a 'discernible connection to the timeless, the ancient, the primal, the pure, the chthonic'.²⁵ Galina Lindquist also noted that the quest for authenticity was at the core of the construction of a shamanic identity and community. References to an original pure tradition that existed in a prior time are often explicit authentication strategies in the field of shamanism.²⁶

By emphasising the archaic Siberian origin of her shamanism, the shamanca thus fulfilled an important criterion of shamanic authenticity. Her workshop focused on a 'primitive sensibility', its fundamental characteristic being the absence of a firm and rational distinction between the inner world of feeling and the external order of existence. This primitivism presupposes that 'primitive man' felt his relationship with the modern world to be continuous, rather than transcendent or alien.²⁷ The origins and the sources of shamanic practices may differ but, ultimately, shamanic practices are all presented as versions of a perennial wisdom. Primitivism also interconnects with the holism as described by James Beckford.²⁸

24 D. MacCannell, 'Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings', *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1973) 589-603; J. Johnson, 'Liberalism and the Politics of Cultural Authenticity', *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 1 (2002) 213-36; A. Fine, 'Crafting Authenticity: The Validation of Identity in Self-Taught Art', *Theory and Society* 32 (2003) 153-80.

25 Taylor, *Global Pop*, 26.

26 G. Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances on the Urban Scene. Neo-Shamanism in Contemporary Sweden* (Stockholm, 1997) 48-9.

27 I have taken the term 'primitive sensibility' from M. Bell, *Primitivism* (London, 1972) 7-31.

28 J.A. Beckford, 'Holistic Imagery and Ethics in New Religious and Healing Movements', *Social Compass* 31 (1984) 259-72.

That is to say, to experience the wholeness of nature, individuals can avail themselves of archaic shamanic practices as they are offered by, for instance, a Siberian shamanca.

As we have seen in Chapters 7 and 8, other shamanic authorities refer to other (combinations of) ancient traditions. Indeed, the authenticity of many shamanic authorities is based on the recognition of their primitive qualities. Shamanic practitioners can enhance the value of their shamanic goods and improve their position on the field by authenticating their knowledge as archaic. While discourses of authenticity are ambiguous, images of the 'real' are always contrasted to images of the 'false'. Furthermore, authenticity is always contrasted with modern social structures.²⁹

Thus, while authenticity is a social construct, it is perceived as a quality that is not created but discovered in one's true core, which exists autonomously, outside social arrangements. Authenticity is thus, in the terms of Bourdieu, a form of symbolic capital. It is the outcome of symbolic struggles in which the workings of the social world are misrecognised as natural. Bourdieu used the term 'charisma ideology' to refer to the situation in which belief is produced by directing the attention to the apparent producer of belief or, in short, to the 'author', suppressing the question of what authorizes the author.³⁰ Bourdieu formulated it as follows: 'This mis-recognition, unaware that it produces what it recognizes, does not want to know that what makes the most intrinsic charm of its subject, its charisma, is merely the product of the countless crediting operations through which agents attribute to the object the powers to which they submit.'³¹

In the field of shamanism, the charisma ideology is tied to a combination of primitivism, perennialism and individualism. For instance, because of her Siberianness, the shamanca possesses archaic knowledge that has a Siberian form, but in the field it is recognised as a variety of perennial knowledge, which means that it is charismatic as it is a form of knowledge that is recognised as natural. Through her Siberianness the shamanca acquires symbolic power. In the words of Bourdieu: 'The quasi-magical potency of the signature is nothing other than the power, bestowed on certain individuals, to mobilize the symbolic energy produced by the functioning of the whole field, i.e. the faith in the game and its stakes that is produced by the game itself.'³²

The American sociologist of religion Meredith McGuire also interprets religious legitimation as an interactional process, and charismatic authority as a successful 'result of the negotiations between a would-be leader and followers. (...) The au-

29 Vannini and Williams, 'Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society' and Aupers, Houtman and Roeland, 'Authenticiteit. De culturele obsessie met echt en onecht'.

30 P. Bourdieu, 'The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods', *Media, Culture and Society* 2 (1980) 261-93 at 263.

31 P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge, 1990) 141.

32 Bourdieu, 'The Production of Belief', 267.

thority of the charismatic leader is not based *only* upon what the *leader* does; however, it also depends upon validation by *followers*.³³ Her interpretation, however, differs from Bourdieu's in that she emphasised that ritual healing practices are also a source of power for the participants. That is to say, in accord with Beckford's interpretation of 'perceived sources of power', the shamanca and her practices are perceived as sources of power. To be precise, via her role as a teacher, the shamanca transmits power and creates the feeling of empowerment.

Empowerment

As a matter of fact, McGuire takes the mobilizing resources of power to be one of the key factors in contemporary ritual healing practices. Enhancing the individual's sense of personal empowerment (from external or internal sources) is a crucial aspect of ritual healing. According to her, contemporary healing movements even represent a counter-statement against the Western medical system that promotes, directly and indirectly, the disempowerment of the sick.³⁴ Her distinction between disease and illness is noteworthy. Scientific medical systems are focused almost exclusively upon curing diseases, that is, the biophysical conditions as interpreted through a medical system's paradigm. The medical specialists ignore the individual's social and psychological response to his or her perceived biophysical condition (illness) as irrelevant. Healing illness is more important in alternative healing systems, and this involves, above all, empowerment.³⁵

In her 1988 *Ritual Healing in Suburban America*, McGuire related the widespread interest within modern Western societies in 'nonmedical forms of healing' to a new mode of individualism, which includes the 'ideal of holism'. Individuals participating in the healing rituals challenge the image that holds selves to be utterly separate from each other. Instead, they perceive everything as interconnected. Furthermore, while participants are collectively engaged in rituals, they seek out privately experienced self-transformation and self-validation. Self-responsibility is also an important feature, as healing rituals promote an active adaptation on the part of the believers. In some cases it may create a sense of guilt and undeserved blame, and the practices may also deflect attention from the sociopolitical and environmental sources of responsibility of the individuals who become sick. Yet, in general, health is defined as a gradual progressive development, and individual episodes of illness are not seen as 'failure'. Instead they are interpreted as signs of progress.³⁶

33 M.B. McGuire, 'Discovering Religious Power', *Sociological Analysis* 44 (1983) 1-10 at 7.

34 M.B. McGuire, 'Ritual, Symbolism and Healing', *Social Compass* 34 (1987) 365-79 at 366.

35 M.B. McGuire, 'Words of Power: Personal Empowerment and Healing', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 7 (1983) 221-40 at 221.

36 M.B. McGuire, *Ritual Healing in Suburban America* (New Brunswick and London, 1988) 245-50.

Ultimately, McGuire interprets the occurrence of ritual healing practices as an aspect of the process in which modern societies 'are discovering, in different ways, the limits of rationalisation'. As they promote a holistic perspective, a strong sense of connectedness with one's body and with other people, alternative healing practices may have far-reaching consequences for the sociocultural and sociopolitical spheres in modern society, according to McGuire, who wrote: 'Institutions of the public sphere may have to change to accommodate these individualisms'.³⁷

McGuire's empathetic interpretation, however, disregards a crucial aspect of empowerment. Namely, that the discourse of empowerment is omnipresent in contemporary Western societies, and not only in contemporary ritual healing practices. Moreover, empowerment is a contested concept that needs to be examined critically. For some it may be a challenge to modern social structures. In contrast, others identify it as a myth, and as a key term in the discourse that, in the past few decades, has increasingly encouraged women to believe that taking care of their psychological selves is making them more powerful. This discourse locates the problems of women within a medical and psychological context rather than in the sociopolitical domain. In that sense, empowerment can even be perceived as a function of the colonisation of the women's psyches.³⁸

To understand the disempowering work of empowerment we have to take the neoliberal governance of which it is part into account. When empowerment emerged as a keyword it effectively replaced the now much-maligned term welfare. As a matter of fact, the focus on empowerment is an important aspect of the neoliberal transformations that took place around the world from the 1980s onwards. As states attempted to downsize their welfare bureaucracies and reinvent themselves as streamlined and efficient institutions, individual empowerment came to be celebrated as an incentive of the self-regulated free market. Along with economic liberalisation, austerity programmes and privatisation, empowerment is now an accepted part of development orthodoxy.³⁹

According to the sociologist Nikolas Rose, a shift has taken place that involves a thorough reordering of the ways in which political rule is exercised. Governing through society has changed into to governing through individuals' capacities for self-realization. This amounts to a 'new habitat of subjectification', one characterized by 'the belief that individuals can shape an autonomous identity for themselves through choices in taste, music, goods, styles and habits'. In the new logic of 'responsibility', greater freedom is ascribed to individuals as consumers in markets for goods and services. Individual consumers are made responsible for their own

37 McGuire, *Ritual Healing in Suburban America*, 257.

38 D. Becker, *The Myth of Empowerment. Women and the Therapeutic Culture* (New York, 2005).

39 F. Miraftab, 'Making Neo-liberal Governance: The Disempowering Work of Empowerment', *International Planning Studies* 9 (2004) 239-59; A. Sharma, *Logics of empowerment: development, gender, and governance in neoliberal India* (Minneapolis, 2008) xvi.

good (in terms of health, diet, education or security) and for various collective goods as well (such as environmental conservation, global poverty and climate change). Individualism and consumerism are thus intricately linked to empowerment, as they have become central to 'the dispersed process of responsabilization'.⁴⁰ The neoliberal 'mode of domination', as Bourdieu would have called it, has substituted seduction for repression and, thus, 'the velvet glove for the iron fist'.⁴¹

Empowerment has thus become a strategic notion during the process in which people are 'disempowered over their working lives' at the same time as they are forced to make choices in their private lives, as Matthew Wood argues. As we have seen, he relates the occurrence of healing practices in which possession is a core element to the rise of 'neoliberal globalization'. As people are required to exert self-authority while being denied access to authority, 'means of possession', which shamanic practices are, present a religious form that enables people 'to exert authority over higher powers that exist beyond them within social contexts that access and limit such authority'.⁴² From this perspective, the rhetoric of empowerment that pervades shamanic practices should not be accepted as an explanation in itself. Instead, by using the vernacular of empowerment, shamanists play the game of shamanism according to the logic of the neoliberal structures in which the shamanic got going.

Shamanisms in society

In line with Lindquist, I have found that the field of shamanism is largely informed by the values and concerns of the embracing society. Lindquist emphasised that contemporary shamanisms are rooted in premises that are already shared and culturally accepted. Without using the term 'empowerment', Lindquist also described how the 'ludic space' of shamanic practices mitigates the harsh character of this life.⁴³ Yet is she correct when she claims that the 'disembedded and deculturalized nature of neo-shamanic practices, conceived by the practitioners as the universality of shamanism, is to a large extent responsible for their success in the West'? Are contemporary shamanists in the Netherlands engaged in playful attempts to 're-enchant' the world? Should contemporary shamanic practices be regarded as a set of notions and techniques borrowed from non-Western tribal peoples and

40 N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom* (Cambridge, 1999) 166, 178; C. Barnett et al., 'The Elusive Subjects of Neo-liberalism', *Cultural Studies*, 22 (2008) 624-53 at 626.

41 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 154.

42 M. Wood, 'Holistic Health Therapies in Comparative Analysis', in M. Bowman (ed), *Religion and Healing* (Enfield Lock, 2000) 81-94, 'Capital Possession: a Comparative Approach to 'New Age' and Control of the Means of Possession', *Culture and Religion* 4 (2003) 159-82, and *Possession, Power and the New Age. Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies* (Aldershot, 2007).

43 Lindquist, *Shamanic Performances*, 52, 285, 298.

adapted to the life of contemporary urban dwellers?⁴⁴

To a certain extent, Lindquist is right. In the wider economy of esoteric goods shamanism stands out as a collection of archaic techniques that can be found all over the world. When practised in the Western world, these techniques may be classified as 'disembedded' and 'deculturalized' as they were supposedly rooted in so-called primitive cultures. The supposedly universal and perennial qualities of shamanism constitute its authenticity, which is vital for its success. Shamanic practices may also be interpreted as playful attempts to 're-enchant' the world, as shamanists take action to get in touch with deeper layers of experience that transcend the structures of the modern world. Yet from my reflexive anthropological perspectives, these features of contemporary shamanism belong to the discourse of shamanists that should not be accepted as an explanation in themselves.

Instead, contemporary shamanisms should be contextualised. That is to say, the field of shamanism is structured by nonformative shamanic authorities who produce shamanic goods to put up for sale on a market. The position of the authorities in the field depends on their ability to craft and stage a form of authenticity that is recognised in the field. As a result, shamanic commodities are packaged as non-commercial and anti-consumerist. They are presented as archaic wares that offer empowerment in the form of perennial knowledge. As shamanic practices offer depoliticised empowerment, the responsibility for the welfare of the self and the world is placed upon individual consumers of shamanism.

The occurrence of contemporary shamanisms can be interpreted as part of the 'deregulation of religion', as James Beckford called the process in which religion 'has come adrift from its former points of anchorage'. According to him, it is one of the 'hidden ironies of secularisation' that religion may be used by people having little or no connection with formal religious institutions. Instead of calling it the 'deinstitutionalisation' of religion, he argued it would be better to label it the 're-institutionalisation' of religion as he detected struggles to impose new boundaries around religion. Indeed, as he also noted, the boundaries between religion and not-religion are contentious.⁴⁵ This is an important issue as it is not immediately evident that the field of shamanism should be considered as part of the field of religion. Shamanisms provide healing, and thus they might just as well be positioned in an arena with other medical and therapeutic practices. Moreover, for some people, shamanic practices function as an amusing pastime or leisure pursuit; instead of participating in a sweat lodge they could as easily have opted for a city trip.

44 Idem, 123.

45 J.A. Beckford, 'The Politics of Defining Religion in Secular Society: From a Taken-for-granted Institution to a Contested Resource', in J.G. Platvoet and A.L. Molendijk (eds.), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* (Leiden, 1999) 23-40 at 26.

Interpreting the establishment of a field of shamanism as a process of autonomisation that involves a shifting of boundaries and a restructuring of the social arenas demonstrates that the boundaries between the religious and the secular are 'by no means clear, fixed or impermeable', as Beckford argued. Indeed, it is not only religion that has come adrift, and it is not only religion that has been reinstitutionalised. Other social phenomena have also changed, and in the process new social configurations have emerged, that is, new fields.⁴⁶

Here we can return to the shamanca again, as it may be concluded that the field of shamanism cannot be understood by interpreting the shamanca as a bearer of an archaic shamanistic tradition. She does not carry the shamanic nucleus into the twenty-first century, as participants in the field would have it. Instead, the shamanca's practices should be related to the field of which they are a part. It is necessary to recognise the genesis of the field of shamanism as a 'process of autonomization'. The field was institutionalised through struggles about shamanism within specific sociohistorical developments. Yet 'genesis implies amnesia of genesis'. That is to say, participants in the field misrecognise the workings of the social world by perceiving shamanism as perennial.⁴⁷ While a proper understanding of contemporary shamanisms can only be reached by relating it to the field of shamanism, and thus by perceiving it as a range of social practices within a specific context, it is still fruitful to consider the genealogies of shamanism.

Genealogies of shamanism

The transnational and national fields of shamanism are the outcomes of an intricate range of genealogies of shamanism that form a thorny forest of conceptualisations. During their long journeys the terms 'shaman' and 'shamanism' have moved from one cultural domain into others, gaining new meanings along the way as the terms were continuously reinterpreted and censored according to the imperatives of the distinct fields in which the interpreters operated. Some meanings of shamanism persisted, others almost faded away. The shamanca, for instance, touched on the significant meaning of nature, but she did not allude to poetry or gender alteration. It is, therefore, crucial to focus on the complex continuities and discontinuities that are involved in the genealogies of shamanism.

46 J. Beckford, 'Secularism', in idem, *Social Theory & Religion* (Cambridge, 2003) 30-72 at 33. For a partial genealogy of the concept 'secular', see T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, 2003). See also J.N. Bremmer, 'Secularisation: Notes Toward a Genealogy', in H. de Vries (ed.), *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (Fordham, 2008) 432-7.

47 P. Bourdieu, 'The Market of Symbolic Goods', *Poetics* 14 (1985) 13-44.

Continuities and discontinuities

Even though I interpret the current transnational field of shamanism as a product of neoliberalisation, I do not identify contemporary shamanism as an 'invention of tradition'. Instead, contemporary shamanisms demonstrate the 'inventiveness of tradition', to use a term borrowed from the American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, who used it in his spirited attack on what he saw as unfortunate tendencies in the invention of tradition debate. According to him, cultures have always been invented, albeit in terms governed by the culture of those who invent them. Sahlins is critical of the 'invention' argument because it undermines the cultural continuity thesis by questioning the authenticity of the cultural identity that is supposed to have persisted through change.⁴⁸

It is noteworthy that Sahlins's critical remarks on the 'invention of tradition' were ingredients in his attack on what he described as the 'powerists'. According to him, they explain any given cultural phenomenon as existing/persisting as a result of the work it does to stabilize the power structure of the society in which it appears. Like other functionalist arguments, Sahlins argued, 'powerist' analyses cannot explain the cultural content of the phenomena they analyse, since there is no reason why other contents could not have performed the stabilizing work with which they are credited equally well. A shift to explaining content would ultimately lead to the collapse of the main social theoretical assumptions about the universality and transparency of the nature of self-interest that are at the heart of the powerist approach.⁴⁹ Bourdieu's theory of practices however, notwithstanding its 'powerism', to use Sahlins's term, allowed me to shed light on the continuities without disregarding the discontinuities in the genealogies of shamanism.

Historians of religion, social and cultural anthropologists, psychologists, folklorists, artists and others use the terms 'shaman' and 'shamanism' for a wide variety of vastly different phenomena. As societies and their predicaments changed, so too did the occult, artistic, scholarly, religious, nationalistic, therapeutic, and other

48 M. Sahlins, 'Two or Three Things that I Know about Culture', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5 (1999) 399-421; V. Li, 'Marshall Sahlins and the Apotheosis of Culture', *New Centennial Review* 1 (2001) 201-87 at 244.

49 J. Robbins, 'Humiliation and Transformation: Marshall Sahlins and the Study of Cultural Change in Melanesia', in *The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia. Humiliation, Transformation and the Nature of Cultural Change* (Farnham, 2005) 3-21 at 8-9; T. Otto, 'Rethinking Tradition: Invention, Cultural Continuity and Agency', in J. Wassmann and K. Stockhaus (eds.), *Experiencing New Worlds* (New York, 2007) 36-57. Sahlins expressed it as follows in 1993: 'Unfortunately a scholarly air of inauthenticity hangs over this modern culture movement. The academic label "invention" already suggests contrivance, and the anthropological literature too often conveys the sense of a more or less counterfeit past, drummed up for political effects, which probably owes more to imperialist forces than to indigenous sources'. M. Sahlins, *Waiting for Foucault, Still* (Chicago, 2002¹) 3.

charms of shamanism. Needless to say, the meanings of the terms 'shaman' and 'shamanism' varied with the circumstances under which the diverse authorities authorised their state-of-the-art interpretation and/or construction of scholarly or supposedly archaic and perennial knowledge. To paraphrase Talal Asad, there cannot be a universal definition of shamanism, not only because the constituents of the phenomena that have been labelled shamanism are historically specific, but also because the definitions are historical products of discursive processes. Power is important in the struggles in which shamanism is constructed, attributed or challenged, as the exercise of power in the different areas of society, or fields, contributed to changing conceptions of shamanism.⁵⁰

My depiction of the genealogies of shamanism started with European travellers in Siberia and finished with a Siberian shamanca touring the Netherlands. Needless to say, the shamanism of the shamanca is far removed from the practices of the shamans whom Westerners witnessed in the seventeenth century. Her shamanism is also far removed from Eliade's 'techniques of ecstasy', and from the psychedelic shamanism that was staged in Esalen during the 1960s. Nonetheless, the continuities in the genealogies of shamanism are obvious, as some of the connotations of the term 'shamanism' continued to shape the conceptualisation of shamanism. As mystics, healers or technicians of the sacred, shamans were identified as bearers of archaic (or primitive) knowledge, and in possession of instruments to connect with spirit worlds, the collective unconscious or separate realities.

Not all conceptualisations of shamanism flourished. In James Beckford's terminology, the 'power which convinces' guided the growth and direction of the genealogies of shamanism. All authorities of shamanism and shamanic authorities struggled to gain a hearing for their testimonies, declarations and directions, but not all were equally influential.⁵¹ Moreover, some interpretations of shamanism have lost their power and legitimacy. The association of shamanism with Islam, for instance, was established by Dutch orientalists but seems to be virtually forgotten now. Shamanism and psychedelics is another case in point. While it was a central feature of shamanism during the 1960s, only a minority of shamanists deal with drugs in the current Dutch field of shamanism.⁵² A more notable example is the 'Uranian temperament' of shamans, as Edward Carpenter expressed it. Carpenter is still considered the most notable historical protagonist of what is known as queer spirituality, where the gay shaman has become part of legitimate discourse. In this subfield one can even 'Become a Gay Shaman' by following courses. As

50 T. Asad, 'The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category', in idem, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993) 27-54 at 29; Beckford, *Social Theory & Religion*, 172-9.

51 J.A. Beckford, 'The Restoration of "Power" to the Sociology of Religion', *Sociological Analysis* 44 (1983) 11-31 at 21.

52 See, for instance, www.samoerai.eu/ayahuasca and www.aharata.nl/sjamanisme/ayahuasca-sjamanisme.

we have seen, Bogoras already described shamans forgetting their 'former masculine knowledge' in 1901 (Chapter 3). The sex transformation or gender-bending of shamans was an important concern for some shamanologists. The gay shaman, however, only captivates a small minority of shamanists.⁵³

It is important to note that other concepts that have been associated with shamanism have also changed in time and place. The idea of authenticity, for instance, has travelled a long way in conjunction with shamanism and taken different shapes in different historical contexts. That is to say, the authentic life-style choices of contemporary shamanic consumers differ radically from the authenticity that Johann Gottfried Herder associated with shamanism, as we have seen in Chapter 2. The same can be said about primitivism. While Herder's primitivism was focused on the *Volk* as an organic whole, the primitivism of contemporary shamanisms is, in general, associated with universal and perennial wisdom.

The individualism of contemporary shamanism should also be distinguished from the individualism of other shamanologies. To be exact, whereas shamanism is nowadays available on a free market, for anyone searching for their deep and true selves, and in non-formative arrangements, the individualism that guided most earlier conceptualisations of the shaman focused on the shaman as a privileged individual who, due to his distinct command over the spirit world, was in a position to guide other people. Eliade's shaman, for instance, made the mystic journey to the cosmic tree on behalf of others. The various conceptualisations of the shaman-poet also emphasised the distinct standing of the shaman-poet in relation to others in his community. During contemporary workshops in shamanism the shaman or shamanic expert still offers guidance, but clients and students go on shamanic journeys themselves. As we have seen in Chapter 7, they might even encounter their 'inner shaman', as Stanley Krippner claimed.

This transformation is closely related to the conceptualisation of shamanic power, which is, sure enough, also a construction that has changed during the genealogies of shamanism. In general, the power of shamanism was supposed to reside in shamans, as they were the virtuous technicians of the sacred. Their power was

53 Carpenter and the 'Become a Gay Shaman' course are mentioned in R. McCleary, *A Special Illumination: Authority, Inspiration and Heresy in Gay Spirituality* (London, 2004) 179-81. Carpenter is presented as the historical protagonist in S.R. Munt, 'Queer Spiritual Places', in K. Browne et al. (eds.), *Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and Sacred Places* (Farnham, 2010) 1-33 at 14. The NYC Gay Men's Shamanic Circle, for instance, is a group of male shamanic practitioners, based in New York City who, according to their website, 'gather to create sacred space for men who identify as queer, gay, or men who love men. We perform shamanic journey work for the purpose of healing on many levels: including ourselves, our communities, and Mother Earth', see www.nycgayshamans.net. The Gay Men's Medicine Circle is based in West Hollywood, California. They usually meet in private to perform shamanic activities. They also hold public activities at regular intervals, see <http://gaymensmedicinecircle.org>.

a source of power for other, less inspired individuals. From the 1960s onwards, however, shamanism was converted into a source of power for all. That is to say, shamanic power was increasingly located in every single individual. Shamans were still perceived as the ultimate experts, the shamanic virtuosi, but it was up to individuals to explore their inner sources of shamanic power. Indeed, shamanic power travelled a long road before it became an option for self-responsible consumers.

The concept 'shamanism' is thus a construction and, in the words of James Beckett, a free floating phenomenon. The word 'shaman' has come to mean many things to many people, as Gloria Flaherty put it.⁵⁴ Yet it should be clear that the distinct conceptualisations of 'shaman' and 'shamanism' are, in the terminology of Bourdieu, products of classification struggles, and parts of classification systems. They are social products and fought over in a permanent struggle.⁵⁵

The classificatory conundrum regarding the concepts 'shaman' and 'shamanism' has inspired many scholars to argue against their use. In his 2004 theoretical exploration of the archaeology of religion, the British archaeologist Timothy Insoll wrote: "The shaman might be the interpretatively fashionable religious label of the moment, but it too would seem to be, in the majority of its applications, a grave miscategorisation, a reduction of something infinitely more complex to a label which is, even in its relatively recent creation, little understood in itself".⁵⁶ Klein et al. even argued that the very vagueness of the notion of the shaman makes it so attractive to so many scholars, lay people, advertisers, tour guides, museum curators and nation-states: 'By allowing us to avoid certain other words and categories that would force us to confront the historical, social, and cultural specifics of the peoples in question, the words "shaman" and "shamanism" make scholars' lives easier'.⁵⁷ But what kind of label is 'shamanism'?

Classification

The problems arising from the use of general terms such as 'shaman' and 'shamanism' have been lucidly analysed by the Dutch anthropologist Anton Blok. In his 1976 methodological guideline for anthropology, Blok argued that Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblances could clarify the opposition between nominalism and essentialism. Blok argued against the 'nomothetic' or essentialist approach, in which terms are defined so that they have a clear and uniform meaning, and against the nominalist approach, in which definitions are not true or false, but scholarly tools or categories, based on conventions. In Blok's approach, 'shamanism' is not a category in which all members are identical in all characteristics

54 G. Flaherty, *Shamanism and the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, 1992) 245.

55 P. Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984) 479.

56 T. Insoll, *Archaeology, Ritual, Religion* (London, 2004) 143.

57 C.F. Klein et al, 'The Role of Shamanism in Mesoamerican Art. A Reassessment', *Current Anthropology* 43 (2002) 383-419 at 392.

(‘monothetic types’). Instead, it is a category in which all members are similar but not identical (called ‘polythetic types’ by the British social anthropologist Rodney Needham (1923–2006). In Blok’s approach shamanisms can be compared in classificatory terms that refer to serial likenesses.⁵⁸

Alas, only a small minority of scholars of shamanism have moved towards a classification of shamanisms that is akin to a polythetic classification of shamans or shamanisms. The admirable social-anthropological studies of Nadel, Firth and Lewis are cases in point. Yet in the dominant lineage of shamanology, the term ‘shaman’ is not used for a social type that can be distinguished from other social types. Instead, the most influential lineages of shamanism are composed of less meticulous shamanologies. The terms are used loosely, for a wide variety of characters, in a wide variety of contexts. Moreover, the definitions are constructed in a wide variety of fields. As the concepts moved from one cultural domain into others, scholars time and again overlooked the differences between the phenomena that were labelled shamanism. The widespread misappropriation of Shirokogoroff’s work is a case in point. Scholars also habitually overlooked the context in which the terms were brought into play. In Bourdieu’s terminology, the terms did not bring with them the field of production of which they were products, while the recipients of the terms who were themselves in a different field of production, reinterpreted the texts in accordance with the structure of the field of reception.⁵⁹

Shamanism is not only a contested concept, but a problematic concept as well, as Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphreys also noted when they wrote: ‘Like caste, taboo, and mana, shamanism is more of an exotic essence, a romanticised inversion of Western rationalism, than a scholarly category that can stand up to any sustained interrogation.’⁶⁰ Even though the ‘commonsense idea that “universals” are identical things that must be discoverable all over the world is an illusion produced by the “reifying” modes of “Western” thought, as a “universal”, the concept guided other shamanologies, that is, in the words of the Danish scholar

58 R. Needham, ‘Polythetic Classification: Convergence and Consequences’, *Man* NS 10 (1975) 349–69. A. Blok, *Wittgenstein en Elias: een methodische richtlijn voor de antropologie* (Amsterdam, 1976). Needham, who progresses from Wittgenstein’s ‘family resemblances’ to the taxonomical idea of ‘polythetic classification’, argues that ‘comparative studies carried out in the stock classificatory terms of anthropology are subverted by the realisation that they refer not to common features but to polythetic classes of social facts’. Yet, ‘effective comparison may nevertheless be practical by reliance of purely formal terminology of analytical concepts’. See also F.J. Porter Poole, ‘Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 54 (1986) 411–57.

59 P. Bourdieu, ‘The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas’, in R. Shusterman (ed.), *Bourdieu, a Critical Reader* (Oxford, 1999) 220–8.

60 N. Thomas and C. Humphreys, ‘Introduction’, in idem (eds.), *Shamanism, history, and the State* (Michigan, 1996) 1–12 at 2.

of religion Jeppe Sinding Jensen: 'Human social and cultural constructs are the products of intentional actors with certain concerns, but once the products are "released" into the world they more or less lead their own lives and feed back upon what produced them.'⁶¹ Indeed, the tricky pedigree of the term shamanism has not discouraged scholars from suggesting an essence of shamanism, Eliade being a decisive case in point.

Eliade's and other shamanologies produced categories of thought, to bring in Bourdieu again. Ultimately, the history of shamanology, that is, the genealogies of shamanism, form the unconsciousness of contemporary shamanisms. The unconscious of the field of shamanism is made up of the masked and forgotten social conditions of production. The concepts 'shaman' and 'shamanism', separated from their social conditions of production, changed its meaning. The conceptualisations exerted an effect, however, as the building blocks of shamanologies became part of the social construction of shamanism, so to speak.⁶² The Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking should be mentioned here, as he argued that naming alone can only 'do its creative work' if it occurs within institutions. When naming is authorised it can have a 'looping effect'. To be exact, classifications can change the ways in which individuals experience themselves. They can even lead people to evolve their feelings and behaviour in part because they are so classified. According to Hacking, such 'classifications (of people and their behaviour) are *interactive*'.⁶³ In other words, a powerful shamanology can give life to a distinct etiquette of consciousness.⁶⁴

That is to say, only after Eliade had conceptualised shamanism as universal techniques of ecstasy could other scholars argue that they could acquire shamanic knowledge by involving themselves in shamanic techniques. Yet there are major methodological limitations in studies of shamanic experiences, that is, experiences interpreted as shamanic by those who have these experiences. For instance, notwithstanding my participation in shamanic practices, I cannot claim that I shared a common experience or meaning with other participants. I only shared a common participation. This is not due to my lack of shamanic talent, however. The point is that although scholars can participate in shamanic practices and can study shamanic experiences, they cannot study the 'experiencing' itself. The only source of information are the representations of the experiences, that is, the tales and accounts by which experiences are made meaningful. The shamanic experiences of

61 J.S. Jensen, 'Universals, General terms and the Comparative Study of Religion', *Numen* 48 (2001) 238-66 at 245, 247.

62 Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question* (London, 1993) 51

63 I. Hacking, 'Inaugural lecture: Chair of Philosophy and History of Scientific Concepts at the Collège de France, 16 January 2001', *Economy and Society* 31 (2002) 1-14 at 8, 10, 11. See also idem, 'Making Up People', in Heller and Brooke-Rose (eds.), *Reconstructing Individualism*, 222-36.

64 V. Crapanzano, 'The Etiquette of Consciousness', *Social Research* 68 (2001) 627-49.

scholars of shamanism do not represent the experiences of other participants. Yet the authorities on shamanism function as taste-makers and they guide the ways in which shamanists give meaning to their shamanic experiences.⁶⁵

Conclusion

The genealogies of shamanism consist of an intricate assortment of conceptualisations of shamanism that travelled in and between times and places. The history of the continuously changing concept 'shamanism' has shaped contemporary conceptualisations of shamanism as well as contemporary shamanic practices. Building on a choice of particular shamanologies, but oblivious to their historical production, contemporary shamanic experts use their shamanisms as antidotes to modern structures. My genealogies suggest that these supposedly timeless shamanisms are, on the one hand, products of the history of the conceptualisation of shamanism. On the other hand, some of their main features are as ancient as the structures in which they were established. Conceptualisations of shamanisms have always been socially constructed and authorised within distinct social contexts. Contemporary Western shamanisms are no exception. They are parts of the long genealogies of shamanism and, at the same time, part and parcel of contemporary Western society.

Unfortunately, I cannot but conclude that the continuities and discontinuities of the genealogies of shamanism form an arrangement that is too complex to recapitulate easily. That is to say, my reconstruction of the genealogies of shamanism demonstrates that the field of shamanism cannot be understood by interpreting shamanisms as bearers of one or more archaic shamanistic traditions. Neither can contemporary shamanisms simply be interpreted as the outcome of increasing anti-modern sentiments. With this conclusion, it is time to return to the three historiographers of shamanism whom I discussed in the first chapter. How does my analysis add to the studies by Hutton, Von Stuckrad and Znamenski? In other words, in what way do my genealogies of shamanism improve on their historical studies?

First of all, my genealogies clearly support Ronald Hutton's view that 'Siberian shamanism' has been a problematic term ever since records of it began. In accordance with his historiography, my genealogies also present the label 'shaman' as flawed. On the basis of my analysis, however, I would suggest that the term 'shamanism' is even more problematic than Hutton has acknowledged in his book.⁶⁶ This is a result of the wider scope of my genealogical project, which was not limited to Western interpretations of Siberian shamans. With the increase in phenom-

65 D. Yamane, 'Narrative and Religious Experience', *Sociology of Religion* 61 (2000) 171-89.

66 R. Hutton, *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination* (London, 2001) 149.

ena labelled as 'shamanism', the difficulties of the term also only increased. It is also because of my focus on the socio-political contexts in which knowledge about shamans was and is constructed. That is to say, my genealogies of shamanism give no reason to agree with Hutton's suggestion that 'the traits which underpin Siberian shamanism occur naturally in individuals throughout humanity, although they are given different cultural expressions at particular times and places.' Western scholars did not have to go to 'to the far end of Eurasia to find a term for something apparently inherent in humanity', as he would have it. On the contrary, my genealogies point to the social construction of these supposedly inherent human qualities.⁶⁷

Bourdieu helped me to interpret the conceptualisation of shamanism as a social practice and as part of power struggles that should be located within one or more relatively distinct fields. Instead of assuming a certain essence that is inaccurately labelled 'shamanism', as Hutton proposed, my genealogies suggest that the label 'shamanism' has been used strategically in many different contexts to allude to different kinds of 'pure' or 'authentic' essences of different phenomena. It escaped Hutton's attention that the most influential essentialist definitions of shamanism were products of strategic actions of cultural aristocracies, who, through this essentialism, could legitimise their own authoritative positions as the result of their essential and inherent virtue. Nor did he observe that genealogies of shamanism owe their formation to the power and abilities of authorities to pinpoint the essential characteristics of shamanism.⁶⁸

This brings us to Von Stuckrad, who has claimed the concept of 'nature' as the 'central leitmotiv' of contemporary Western shamanism and linked the 'intrinsic continuities' of nineteenth-century philosophical thought to contemporary deep ecology and shamanic discourse in Europe and North America. As I have already noted in Chapter 1, Von Stuckrad introduced some important aspects of the genealogy of shamanism, and his historiography traced some of the main philosophical streams that shaped contemporary shamanisms. My genealogies confirm his idea that the idealisation of 'shamanistic potentials' already occurred during the eighteenth century and that, therefore, the idealisation of shamanism was not a New Age occurrence. The discourse of contemporary Western shamanisms may be deeply rooted in European and North American history of thought, and the nature discourse of some of these shamanisms may have come into being during the nineteenth century.⁶⁹

Yet Von Stuckrad's construction of lineages is, above all, a history of philosophi-

67 Hutton, *Shamans*, 149.

68 Indeed, 'Aristocracies are essentialist', as Pierre Bourdieu remarked in *Distinction*, 24.

69 K. von Stuckrad, 'Reenchanting Nature: Modern Western Shamanism and Nineteenth-Century Thought', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70 (2002) 771-99 at 777-8, *Schamanismus und Esoterik. Kultur- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (Louvain, 2003).

cal narratives that seemingly occur outside social structures. The social arenas and the social position of the narrators remain much too underexposed. Because of this underexposure of the wider sociopolitical contexts in which shamanic discourses developed from the 1960s onwards, Von Stuckrad's study of shamanism barely addresses larger societal issues and he does not analyse the significance of contemporary shamanism in terms of the structuring or functioning of society. For Von Stuckrad, the core of shamanism seems to be philosophical. In contrast, my genealogies zoom in on contemporary shamanism as a variety of social practices that took and still take shape within wider socioeconomic circumstances. My genealogical approach to shamanism therefore not only highlights the understanding of shamanology and contemporary shamanism as social practices, but also focuses on the understanding of the macro-sociological processes in which they occur.

Finally, how do my genealogies of shamanism compare with Znamenski's *Beauty of the Primitive*? As I have argued before, his historiography is excellent but, like Von Stuckrad's, it does not sufficiently explore the sociopolitical contexts in which shamanism was interpreted. This may account for his assumption that the growing appreciation of shamanism in the West is part of increasing anti-modern sentiments. His argument is debatable for several reasons. First of all, it was not shamanism per se that was appreciated in the Western world, but specific conceptualisations of shamanism. Secondly, even though contemporary shamanic practitioners may interpret their own practices as 'anti-modern' or 'countercultural', a scholar should, as we have seen, critically interpret these interpretations and not accept them at face value. Finally, the shamanisms that came to be established as a contemporary Western practice from the early 1980s onwards, are not identical to the 1960s interpretations of shamanism. Interpretations and conceptualisations of shamanism, like other aspects of life, along with the substantial sociopolitical transformations, changed considerably from the 1960s to the 1980s. Indeed, anti-modern conceptualisations of shamanism should be related to the multiple modernities in which they emerge.⁷⁰

Znamenski's main argument seems to be in accordance with contemporary shamanic discourses in which supposedly archaic wisdom is welcomed, but it is not in accordance with the findings of my genealogies, as they present a much more complex picture of the intricacies of the modern and anti-modern traits of contemporary shamanisms. Too great an emphasis on the anti-modern sentiments of contemporary shamanisms obscures the fact that the structures and logic of contemporary shamanic practices have distinctly modern qualities. Of course, contemporary shamanisms can be characterised by their romantic primitivism, but also by their globalism, their consumerism, their educational structures, their up-to-date websites and digital newsletters and their elective affinities with the

70 S. N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', *Daedalus* 129 (2000) 1-29.

neoliberal discourse of individualism, empowerment and self-accountability.⁷¹

Although Znamenski's use of the term 'metaphor' is significant, as I have noted in the first chapter, it would have served his historiography better if he had given it more thought. Metaphors are pervasive in everyday life as people habitually understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argued in their famous work on metaphors.⁷² A metaphor is not just a poetical way of speaking that can be ignored or paraphrased away if we so wish, as it is deeply embedded in our language, culture and the way we think. It strongly affects how we experience and interact with the world and other people. Znamenski does not clearly acknowledge that the shaman metaphor, like most other metaphors, is based on culturally rooted conceptual metaphors and that in the history of its use, the shaman metaphor became part of a variety of different metaphorical mappings. Moreover, he does not specify the character of his metaphor and the many uses of the shaman metaphor as a structural mapping between a known and a target domain, and this explication is necessary 'if precision of comparison is to follow comparative insight'.⁷³

It is, therefore, significant that he did not bring up Nadel's social anthropological perspectives on shamanism in his otherwise rather wide-ranging historiography and that he misrepresented Ioan Lewis's perspectives as an 'Eliadian vision'.⁷⁴ Social anthropological perspectives could have helped him to perceive contemporary shamanism as a form of social action that took shape in times of social and cultural change. Instead of focusing on shamanism as a 'living spiritual technique', he should have turned his attention, for instance, to the distinct forms of leadership in contemporary shamanism.

In my genealogies, in contrast, social anthropological interpretations receive attention precisely because they stand out for their brilliance. As I have argued before, social anthropologists took steps to turn the concept 'shamanism' into a fruitful sociological category that could make comparison possible. Furthermore, my interpretation of contemporary shamanisms in the context of the rise of neo-liberalisation is principally inspired by Matthew Wood's sociological analysis of spirit possession, which is akin to classic social anthropological perspectives. To sum up, practices in which possession is a key element, as shamanic practices are,

71 A. Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive. Shamanism and the Western Imagination* (Oxford, 2007).

72 G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London, 1980) and 'Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language', *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980) 453-86 at 454-5.

73 F.J. Porter Poole, 'Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 54 (1986) 411-57 at 422, 433. Porter Pool argues that 'the structure of family resemblances, polythetic categories, metaphoric constructions, and analogic mappings may shed important light on the formal nature of comparison' (441).

74 Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 188

enable people to exert authority over higher powers that exist beyond them within social contexts that access and limit such authority.⁷⁵

My genealogical reflexive project contributes to the historiography of shamanism by interpreting shamanology and contemporary shamanic practices as social practices within distinct social contexts. Perceiving them as such offers new perspectives on the complex history of the terms 'shaman' and 'shamanism'. Instead of merely identifying the meaning and significance of the terms, my genealogies take account of the distinct struggles in which the terms acquired their meaning and significance. It has proved to be crucial for a proper interpretation of the history of the terms. Ultimately, the power, charisma and authority of shamanologies and contemporary shamanisms are the outcomes of struggles that shaped and will continue to shape the genealogies of that fascinating subject: shamanism.

75 M. Wood, 'Holistic Health Therapies in Comparative Analysis', in M. Bowman (ed.), *Religion and Healing* (Enfield Lock, 2000) 81-94, 'Capital Possession: a Comparative Approach to 'New Age' and Control of the Means of Possession', *Culture and Religion* 4 (2003) 159-82, and *Possession, Power and the New Age. Ambiguities of Authority in Neoliberal Societies* (Aldershot, 2007).

